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ABSTRACT

Performance standards and ethics for project management remain to be firmly established. Research to provide guidelines for externally applied standards has only just begun. The contract serves as an internal standard against which the project may be judged. The author's experience suggests the following items as part of a possible ethical code: (1) project directors should seek funds only for projects in their range of competence; (2) project directors should seek funds only for projects they can commit themselves to; (3) project awards obligate the parties to adhere to the contract; (4) long-term personal commitments need careful monitoring; (5) proprietary rights to project materials must be clearly delineated; (6) project managers have an obligation to disseminate project results; and (7) funds must be dealt with honestly. (Author/PGD)

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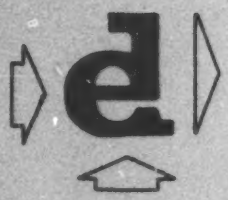

WORKING PAPER SERIES

AERA-SIG ON RESEARCH MANAGEMENT

SYMPOSIUM ON ETHICS AND STANDARDS FOR R AND D MANAGEMENT
TORONTO, CANADA, APRIL 1978

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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AERA-SIG ON RESEARCH MANAGEMENT

Symposium on Ethics and Standards for R and D Management
Toronto, Canada, April 1978

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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Introduction

The initial paper in this Symposium by Sue Klein and her Committee raised the question whether or not there should be a code of ethics for educational research and development (1). The second paper by Boerrigter focused upon the standards to be used in the selection of proposals for funding by agencies supporting research and development activities (2). Both of these papers deal with broad brush strokes on the problem of ethics and standards and viewed largely from the perspective of the funding agency.

It is generally recognized that the primary vehicle for the conduct of research and development activities is the funded project under the policies, procedures, and standards as noted by the two previous papers. It is the intent of this paper to focus upon the project because of its prime position as the vehicle for the actual conduct of research and development. More specifically, the emphasis will be upon the management aspects of such projects as opposed or contrasted to their substantive nature.

Briefly defined, project management is the application of management principles, and practices to efforts essentially temporary in nature as contrasted to permanent and routine on-going operations in an agency or institution. These temporary efforts consist of human and other resources assembled together for designated periods of time in order to accomplish identified objectives with accompanying performance specifications within pre-established

schedules and cost dimensions. The individual charged with the authority and responsibility for this temporary effort is variously referred to as project manager, principal investigator, or project coordinator.

Since projects are temporary efforts, they are viewed as having a life cycle involving creation, existance, and eventual termination. In one sense, the project situation is the rare case where one is expected to work her or himself out of a job. For purpose of discussion, the project life cycle can be divided into the planning phase, build-up phase, the operations phase, and the close-out phase. These phases could conceivably have standards and ethics applied to each of them but time does not permit a detailed explaination of such a possibility. Some reference will be made to this life cycle in subsequent comments with regard to standards and ethics but not within the above phase categories.

Klein and others in the previous paper made reference to "ethical standards". Since such terminology could be both confusing and ambigious, it may be preferable to deal with standards and ethics as separate entities. For this reason, the remarks presented below are first devoted to some comments on standards and then followed by some comments on ethics.

Comments on Standards

It might be helpful in discussing standards for educational project management to relate an experience that the author has had during the past with regard to standards for project management in the business context. As Chairperson of the Education Committee of the Project Management Institute, the author has participated in discussions of that organization with regard to setting standards for project management as well as devising certification policy and procedures. Some comments with regard to the certification of

project managers have already been published (3). It is an interesting observation that this group of professional people highly involved in project management activities in many diverse fields have had a great deal of difficulty in arriving at any agreed upon set of standards. With some candidness, there has even been a problem in trying to define what a standard is in this case. Since many of the members are engineers, any concept of standards seems plausible since they are use to having standards with regard to product quality such as the nature of cement. Under the auspices of Internet, an international group devoted to project management, there has been an attempt to standarized network terminology (4). There has been a tentative draft of a document that identifies how events and activities in networks will be labeled as well as trying to devise standardized terminology and/or develop a glossary of terms upon which there is an agreement. As far as this presentor knows, the document has not preceded beyond the draft discussion stage. The key issue in the eventual certification of project managers would involve their having met certain standards with regard to experience, education, and related matters.

Any discussion of standards for project management involves an implicit (if not explicit) assumption that one has adequate knowledge of the factors contributing to project success. That is, possession or meeting of the standards by the project manager in the conduct of the project relates positively to the eventual delivery of the product. There is a slowly mounting research base giving some suggestions with regard to such possible standards but it is still not highly useful. The case for standards in project management is perhaps analogous to that of developing standards for evaluators.

Some distinction between criteria and standards needs to be made unless

we anticipate using these two terms interchangeably. If so, then it might be possible to begin to develop some set of criteria for project management. For example, the Department of Defense has established a set of criteria with regard to project management systems in order to judge the quality of management systems being applied in a particular case. These standards focus mainly upon schedule and cost dimensions of a project. The criteria are useful in being able to compare an existing project management system against a defined set of criteria presumed to reflect needed management practice. To some degree, the evaluation criteria noted by Boerrigter in his presentation suggest a similar situation. In many cases of RFP's and program announcements, the evaluation criteria often spell out, without to much detail, the standards to be employed for judging the project management to be used in the proposed effort. In most cases, there is no subsequent follow-up to determine whether or not any management system actually implemented meets any defined set of criteria. Perhaps we need to look at the efforts of the Department of Defense in setting up potential standards or criteria for project management.

My comments up to this point reflect the imposition of standards upon project management from some external source such as a funding agency or parent organization. It is conceivable also to think of standards deriving from internal sources or from within the project itself. In my own view, the standards for the three major operational phases of the project (build up, operations, termination) derive primarily from the planning phase. This latter focuses upon the development of a proposal outlining the proposed objectives, schedule, resource needs, facility requirements, personnel qualifications, and cost plan. The proposal document as finalized in the contract/

grant arrangement becomes a set of internal standards against which the project performance can be judged. Within this context, it would also be possible to apply certain derived sets of "good practices" recognized by managers. For example, it is generally accepted as good practice that any report developed for internal monitoring of the project will involve comparing planned against actual status. Any reporting system not doing this would thereby be considered a bad practice. There might be some value in developing some set of good and bad management practices as a preliminary vehicle for establishing standards.

Comments on Ethics

Let us now turn our attention to the ethics dimension of the symposium as it relates to project management. What I have to say on this topic is based largely upon a combination of experience in directing projects, observing projects in planning and operation, and the slowly accumulating evidence from research regarding project management. It is by no means intended to be a complete or final list of ethics for project managers operating within parent organizations.

1. Project directors and/or parent organizations should seek funds only for tasks they are competent to do.

   In these days of limited and constrained resources within many institutions, there is a form of encouragement suggesting to people to secure contracts and get grants. It is perhaps more than coincidental that courses and seminars in grantsmanship and proposal development are well attended. While some of this behavior is sincere in that people with good ideas are looking for sources of support, there are many agencies and individuals seeking funds mainly to support other personnel or continue a program which otherwise might terminate. Because of these conditions,

such individuals or agencies may submit proposals in areas in which they have a limited competence to perform. The proposal criteria noted by Boerrigter are designed to help sort out the competent from the incompetent but the practices of grantsmanship can often make this task difficult. In my view, the perspective manager ought to do some soul searching before developing a proposal in response to an RFP or another announcement to see if she or he has the competency to do the task. If not, then they ought not to apply.

2. Application for funding ought to be made only if there is commitment or support to do the task by the individual and parent organization.

The slowing accumulating research on project management highlights the importance of commitment by the project director and project staff as well as the parent organization to the effort. While there is some evidence that techniques such as PERT are helpful in achieving project success, the evidence with regard to personal commitment to project goals is a much stronger data base. Unless the investigator and his organization believes in the project, perhaps it just simply should not be undertaken.

3. If an award is made, there is an obligation to adhere to the contract.

The basic nature of project funding involves a contract of some form between the funding agency and the performing organization. In general, the terms of the contract are contained in the project proposal. It would seem therefore that the project manager has a deep obligation to perform as outlined in the contract. Any modification or changes should be cleared with the supporting agency as well as the parent organization. If a perspective project manager cannot accept this obligation, then it would be unethical to accept the contract.

4. Long term personnel commitments in the temporary context need to be carefully monitored.

As stated early the essence of project management is to work yourself out of a task. This is not only true of the project manager but all project personnel. Recognition is given to the problem of recruiting personnel when long term commitments of employment cannot be made due to the constrained funding. It would seem imperative that a clear and forthright statement should be made to personnel recruited and employed on projects with regard to possible long term employment with parent organizations. Problems associated with tenure commitments, affirmative action, and related matters require a careful monitoring to make sure that project managers are ethical in dealing with project personnel.

5. Clear delineation of proprietary rights and conditions during project operations and close-out should be made.

During the operation phase of one project, this presentor had the experience of an assistant claiming that the material developed under the contract was in fact his property. The rules and regulations of the research foundation administering the project were previously signed by the individual noting that such proprietary rights could not be claimed. This situation ultimately resulted in a bad scene for the individual since certain threatening action had to be made in order to secure actual data results needed for the project final report. Problems of a proprietary nature, including copyrights should be clearly delineated and understood by project personnel.

6. Project managers have an implicit if not explicit obligation to disseminate project results.

Unless conditions of the contract so state the results of a project, if worthwhile, should be disseminated to the educational community through

a variety of mechanisms. Some of these might be formal such as a dissemination grant, others might be informal through presentation at meetings such as AERA. To withhold the results of a project that might possibility benefit students and other persons would seem to be a questionable practice on the part of the principal investigators.

In making the dissemination, it would seem important that the results be written in "plain English". Perhaps some of you saw the recent 60 Minutes program in which a commentary was made by that program on the ambigious and confusing language in the final report issued by a western university with regard to a particular project. A major point highlighted in the presentation was the fact that the project had employed a person to make the final report more readable but that person indicated a lack of understanding of what was actually contained in the report and therefore was not able to judge its level of readability. Such commentary on national television does not facilitate the dissemination of research results.

7. Honesty and integrity should be paramount in dealing with public funds.

Most of those involved in educational research and development activities receive funds from the public treasury. Consequently, there is an obligation to be accountable to the public in terms of project performance. We should be constantly monitoring our behavior and that of our staff to be sure that individuals are not being injured, facts are not being distorted, and misinformation being disseminated. As the case of the 60 Minutes program noted above, it does not help our image when Senator Proxmire makes his monthly Golden Fleece Award to those projects and/or agencies he believes represents a fleecing of the public. In my mind, there's an obligation to ensure that our projects are of sufficient high

quality and importance that they are open to public scrutiny.

On this same point, all project managers, proposal developers, and researchers should become familiar with the Freedom of Information Act and what it is permissible for them and other persons to receive under this Act with regard to proposal rating, final approved proposals, and related matter. A recent publication available from the Government Printing Office titled Citizen's Guide to the Freedom of Information and Privacy Act is available and provides illustrative letters as well as noting the types of materials available under both Acts. Securing reactions to proposals can be helpful to researchers but it should be noted also citizens can inquire about these same proposals as well. For these reasons, it becomes important therefore for research and development people be above board at all times in the acquisition and conduct of research and development projects.

Conclusion

As a special interest group, we have started on a task which in my opinion would be a valuable contribution to the field of educational research and development. At the session on the analysis of research and statistic books presented at this Convention, one of the speakers noted that the topic of ethics was not highly referenced in many of the elementary research methods textbooks. Perhaps the topic of ethics is well enough understood that it need not be presented. On the other hand, we may not have had sufficient experience yet in the management of research and development, particularly under funded conditions, to establish a set of ethics and standards. Whether known or not, movement in the direction of developing a set of ethics and standards in order that the behavior of research and development project

managers might be more carefully monitored is a worthy task for this particular special interest group to develop during the next year.

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